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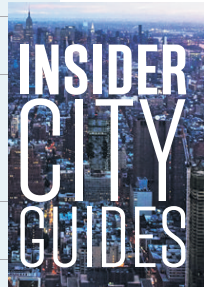
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## IN ANOTHER LIFE

## Testing cattle blood made me bullish for the creative arts

Working with 'strange and wonderful' people in an unlikely job at the Department of Agriculture during the flower power era put Mary McEvoy on the road to becoming an actress

**W**e were called serological assistants, but the name was the poshest part of the job. We tested blood for brucellosis, an infectious disease caused by bacteria. The Department of Agriculture had a farm in Whitehall and we worked in the laboratory attached to it.

We would get blood samples and spin them in a machine to separate the blood. There would be a serum-like substance on the top, and that was the bit we tested. We used a pipette to take out a piece of the serum and put it in little test tubes. We had trays and trays – some people were really efficient and could do boxes and boxes of blood.

There was a station for artificial insemination where they kept the bulls and tested the animals' semen. We didn't do that part – it was reserved for another place – but we used to constantly get boxes with "bulls' balls" written on them.

Although we did the work to the best

of our ability, it was just a backdrop. Loads of people went off to be artists – I became an actor – and everybody was creative in some way. I think it was just the time.

Flower power happened in Dublin later than in San Francisco but we were all hippies with flowers in our hair, long skirts, cheesecloth smocks – the whole nine yards. You'd find a lot of us in desert boots and maxidresses lounging in the hay sheds at lunchtime. I don't think I've met such an interesting group of people since.

We were all into alternative music, so we'd socialise and go to gigs together. I had ended up working in Dublin because I wanted to hear rock music, and there was none in the country. It was hard to get my father's head around me leaving home, though. The job in the

**You'd find us in desert boots and maxi dresses, lounging in hay sheds. I've not met such an interesting group since**

Department of Agriculture had been advertised in the paper – I applied for it and, lo and behold, I found myself there, and then I went to gigs every night.

I was barely 18, and the others were between 18 and 20. We were green and wet behind the ears but full of enthusiasm for life. I'm still in contact with some of my friends from then, but my best friend passed away suddenly.

We had a ball. It was an unusual place to work and I was there for about two years. There was a great supervisor called Chris K who was funny and had that thing of being authoritative but not a pain in the neck. She could run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, as they say.

Martina Stanley, who plays Dolores in *Fair City*, was at the Abbey Theatre at the time. I was thinking of becoming a professional actress but I didn't know how to do it, and Martina was the only professional actress I knew.

One day in the early 1970s Martina and I decided to play tennis in town, so I rang work and said I had terrible sunstroke. We went to St Stephen's Green and a band were playing. I picked up my racket and mimed playing the violin while the two of us were sitting under a tree.

## WALK ABOUT A REVOLUTION

The Ambassador Theatre on Dublin's O'Connell Street is hosting Revolution 1916, the largest private collection of Easter Rising artefacts ever assembled. More than 500 items are on display, many on loan from the Irish Volunteers Commemorative Organisation, including an original 1916 proclamation and dozens of weapons and uniforms used in the conflict. Some of the main locations of the Rising, including Kilmainham Gaol, have been recreated as sets, while art works include a scene of the GPO on O'Connell Street by Charles Hulgraine, right. Adult tickets cost €15. [revolution1916.ie](http://revolution1916.ie)



## CELEBRATE YOUR CELTIC ROOTS

Thousands of visitors are expected to descend upon Carlow for the International Pan Celtic Festival, a six-day celebration of the cultural links between Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Cornwall and the Isle of Man through music, song, dance and language. [panceltic.ie](http://panceltic.ie)

## STRETCH YOUR LEGS

Saturday's Bray 10K Cliff Run is a chance to test your fitness while taking in spectacular sea views over Dublin Bay on a dramatic coastal route through Wicklow. Competitors start on the pebble beach at Greystones then join the cliff path and cross sandy beaches, rough trails and sealed roads before running the length of Bray beach, right, to the finish line. A great test for runners of all abilities, it also has live music at the finish. Entry costs €23 and includes a post-race drink. [gaelforceevents.com/vh](http://gaelforceevents.com/vh)



## GO UNDERCOVER

The annual Dublin: One City, One Book Festival, which encourages everyone to read a selected book connected with the capital during the month of April, returns next month with a series of events that tie in with the centenary of the Rising. This year's page turner is *Fallen* by Lia Mills, right, which tells the story of a young woman struggling for gender equality against the backdrop of the rebellion. Events include performances and talks. Most events are free. [dublinonecityonebook.ie](http://dublinonecityonebook.ie)



Day job McEvoy mingled with artists at the Department of Agriculture, below



On the front of *The Irish Times* the next morning was a picture of us under the tree. I know that Chris knew but she didn't say anything. My hair had been up that day and I wore it down the next day. I knew Chris was so nice she would find it funny and think it wouldn't be worth getting me into trouble over.

They were wonderful times; everyone was an artist and everyone wanted to be something else. I started at the Brendan Smith Academy, which was really the only place where you could train as an actress at the time. I went there at night.

Although I didn't quite see that I could become a professional actress, I resigned from my job with the Department of Agriculture and ended up working in the Project Arts Centre for a couple of months. I was sad because I was letting go these funny, free-spirited people – it was as far from the civil service as you could imagine. They were all strange and wonderful people.

Mary McEvoy stars in *The Matchmaker* at the Gaiety, Dublin, from April 11. Her book *Ordinary Beauty* is out in paperback, €14.20, [easons.com](http://easons.com)

Interview by Yvonne Gordon

Lorraine O'Sullivan, RTE Archives